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SUBJECT: SONIA REVAMPS TWO PARTY COMMITTEES

Classified By: POLCOUNS Geoffrey R. Pyatt for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

11. (U) In the run-up to her re-election as Party President on May 27, Sonia Gandhi on May 25 revamped two important Congress party committees, the Parliamentary Affairs Committee (PAC) and the Media Committee (MC). Defunct for almost 20 years, Sonia plans to make the PAC into an active body and place herself in charge with a view to exercising more oversight regarding the party's legislative role. When Parliament is in session, the PAC will meet twice a week to analyze parliamentary proceedings and provide party guidance to MP's on important issues.

12. (U) The Media Committee will determine how best to project the party's point of view on strategic issues. It will also help organize Congress rallies and meetings, decide which ones Mrs. Gandhi will address, and review drafts of her speeches and public statements. Gandhi confidant Ambika Soni will continue to head the MC, which has been reduced from 15 members to 6.

Comment

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13. (C) Congress willingness to reorganize and revive these key committees indicates growing self-confidence, and likely foreshadows a more aggressive posture in the next parliamentary session. These moves also suggest that Mrs. Gandhi is likely to take more substantial steps after her re-election, including a widely expected Cabinet shuffle in late June or early July. The members of both committees are long-time Sonia loyalists. The only exception is Rajiv Shukla, a relative newcomer who will join the MC, and is quickly moving up the party ranks. A former journalist and ex-BJP member, Shukla joined Congress in 2001 and is close to Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi. Some speculate that he could become a Junior Minister in the upcoming Cabinet shuffle.

BLAKE